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ABSTRACT

Students need to learn the involved patterns of sentences in the English language as well as the inherent structure. First, the paper discusses five common sentence patterns in the English language, with examples. Next, the paper deals with modifiers to extend sentences, including adjectives, adverbs, appositives, and dependent clauses. Finally, types of sentences are discussed: declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory. Brief ideas about activities students may do to learn the structure of the English language are listed. (SR)

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Patterns and Structure of the English Language.

by Marlow Ediger

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PATTERNS AND STRUCTURE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Students need to learn the involved patterns of sentences in the English language as well as the inherent structure. Learning subject matter through the perception of order and modified change makes it more interesting and easier to learn. Students then first of all should sequentially learn sentence patterns as they progress through the public school years. These sentence patterns may be made quite lifelike and meaningful to students.

Sentence Patterns

There are approximately five sentence patterns in English although there is not universal agreement on this. A first sentence pattern to consider is the subject predicate pattern. This pattern may be shown with two words such as, "Dogs bark." Seeing an actual dog doing this is certainly within reality. Or, a student playing the role of a dog and then doing a bark can provide a model for the subject predicate pattern. Illustrated scenes may be drawn or cut out from magazines to show, "Dogs bark." The dramatizations, the drawings, and/or cutting out illustrations may be viewed first and then students describe and write what is happening in each situation.

After seeing the sentence on the chalkboard, students may give a different subject such as cats, owls, and turkeys. They will usually respond with cats, owls, and turkeys do not bark. This provides opportunities for vocabulary growth. Students may say that cats meow, owls hoot, and turkeys gobble. And this is correct. The subject predicate pattern of sentence still stands.

Other words may be given for "bark" in the sentence "Dogs bark," like "howl," "grumble," and "pant." However, the sentence pattern still stays the same with the subject predicate pattern. By playing with words in forming sentence patterns, the student creatively is learning about new words, terms, vocabulary, and arrangements.

A second sentence pattern emphasizes the subject -- predicate -- direct object pattern, as in "The boy ate candy." The question may be raised by students as to which word is the predicate. At this point, the predicate is the action word in the sentence. The only word which deals with an action here is "ate." The subject part of the sentence is relatively easy to determine; thus, the student may ask the question, "Who ate?" The answer is "boy." "Boy ate" then forms the skeleton of the sentence. Additional words may be given in place of "boy," such

as girl, man, woman, and Dan, among others. Words which students may provide in place of "ate" are swallowed, chewed, loved, and disliked. Next, students my give words which take the place of "candy." The sentence pattern still stays the same, being the subject --- predicate -- direct object pattern. The question learners may now raise pertains to how does one determine the direct object. The answer is, "The boy ate what? The word needed here would be candy. There is one word left in the sentence --- The boy ate candy. This word is "The." The article "the" would not need to be discussed here unless students desire to do so and are ready for the concept of "the" being an article. An article here answers the question of which boy. It could be "This," "That," or "A" boy. Articles, at this point, need not be discussed when thinking of sentence patterns; however student questions cannot and must not be ignored. Words supplied to change the subject, predicate, and/or direct object should come from the student. An inductive approach in learning should be stressed. Responses to questions then come form learners. Questions from students should also be invited freely and continuously. A stimulating and challenging learning environment needs to be in he offing. Whatever is taught must be sequential and learners need to be ready for each new concept and generalization taught (See Ediger, 1999, Chapter Eight).

Third, the subject -- predicate -- predicate adjective sentence pattern may be taught such as, The girl is tall." Here, a linking verb "is" is used. There are few linking verbs so that students can master these in a short time. The following are commonly used linking verbs -- is, are, am, was, were. Linking verbs in a predicate adjective sentence pattern join together the subject of the sentence with an adjective, such as "The men were joyful." The word "joyful" is an adjective in that it describes the subject "men." Thus, what kind of men were they? They were joyful men, not sad nor unhappy. Students tend to enjoy providing different words for the subject, the linking verb, and the predicate adjective. Scenes here may be drawn and illustrated pertaining to the subject, linking verb, and the predicate adjective sentence pattern.

A fourth sentence emphasizes the subject, linking verb, and predicate noun pattern, such as "The man is a golfer." The linking verb joins the subject and the noun which means and refers to the same person. Thus, man = golfer and the latter follows the linking verb. As homework, students and their parents could think together about reality situations whereby one = the other, such as man = truckdriver, woman = secretary,

and boy = player. These words may then be joined together in a subject -- linking verb -- predicate noun sentence pattern.

A fifth sentence pattern stresses the subject -- predicate -- indirect object -- direct object pattern. This sentence pattern is very similar to the subject - predicate- direct object pattern such as "Ray sent a letter," An indirect object may be added to this sentence such as "Ray sent Bill a letter." Indirect objects answer the question "to whom?" Thus, Ray sent what? The answer is "letter," To whom was the letter sent? The answer is "Bill." Very often on gift giving occasions, students will use sentences such as the following, containing an indirect object:

1. Arthur gave John a toy car for his birthday present.
2. Marie presented Anne a doll for a Christmas gift.
3. Ben gave Jody a candy heart for Valentine's Day (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Seven).

The above named five sentence patterns are the most common of all in the English language, although there is not perfect agreement on this.

Highly practical uses may be made of different sentence patterns. Students need to have ample opportunities to write using the different sentence patterns. There are a plethora of writing activities which may be emphasized to incorporate sentence pattern use. These include the following:

1. prose and poetry.
2. birthdays and announcements.
3. plays and dramas.
4. diaries and logs.
5. outlines, summaries, and precis' writing.
6. evaluations, opinions, and letters to the editor.
7. business and friendly letters.
8. note taking in class, writing on hobbies, and informing others on plans for specific holidays.
9. assessment of ideas in an ongoing classroom experience.
10. minutes taken of a club meeting or organization (See Ediger, 1997, 114 -117).

Modifiers to Extend Sentences

Sentences are bare indeed if the skeleton only, is written as in the following:

1. The boy ran (subject predicate pattern).
2. Larry caught the ball (subject -- predicate -- direct object pattern).

3. The roses are beautiful (subject -- predicate/linking verb -- predicate adjective pattern).

4. Judy is a singer (subject -- predicate/linking verb -- predicate noun pattern).

5. Alice taught Mary a song (subject -- predicate - indirect object -- direct object pattern).

There is need then to add modifiers to make sentences more meaningful and inclusive. One form of modification which may be used is adjectives, other than predicate adjectives which are a part of the skeleton of a sentence. Thus, adjectives modify or change meanings within a sentence. In sentence pattern number one, immediately above, there ae words which can provide a more accurate and thorough meaning of the word boy, such as what kind of boy is he? The following adjectives modify "boy:" tall, kind, active, short, and slender. Phrases, as a group of sequential words, may also be used as adjectives, as in the following underlined part: The boy <u>with the blue trousers</u> ran. "With the blue trousers" modifies the word boy and tells more about him.

In addition to adjectives, adverbs may modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs, such as in sentence pattern number two above "Larry caught the ball." Larry caught <u>How</u>? slowly, gently, rapidly, and eagerly. Here, an adverb modifies a verb. Phrases may also be used as adverbs as in the following telling <u>how</u> Larry caught the ball:

1. by leaping in the air.
2. by making a shoe string catch.
3. without effort (See Ediger, 1977, 49-51).

Appositives may be used to expand sentences in the following way using sentence pattern number three above: The roses, plants around the yard, are beautiful. Here, roses equals plants. <u>Plants</u> is then in apposition with roses. In sentence pattern number four above, Judy is a singer, several added appositives expand the sentence and information pertaining to Judy:

1. Judy, a teacher, is a singer. Judy equals teacher and the word teacher is an appositive with no verb in between.

2. Judy, a local artist, is a singer. Judy equals artist which is an appositive.

3. Judy, an entertainer of long standing, is a singer. Judy equals entertainer.

Clauses might also expand a sentence and provide

additional information about a topic, person, or event. From sentence pattern number five with a subject, predicate, indirect object, and direct object (Alice taught Mary a song), a compound sentence can be in evidence by adding another independent clause: Jane played the piano. The two independent clauses then become a compound sentence: Alice taught Mary a song, and Jane played the piano. The conjunction "and" joins two egual value clauses, both being independent, and each will stand meaningfully by itself (See Ediger, 2000, 6 -13).

Dependent clauses do not stand with meaning by themselves such as "After Alice taught Mary a song." The dependent clause does make sense when joined in a related manner with the independent clause as in "After Alice taught Mary a song, Jane played the piano. This sentence then becomes a complex sentence, when differentiating it from a compound sentence. "After Alice taught Mary a song." is dependent upon "Jane played the piano" to make sense. It is an adverb dependent clause since it modifies the verb "played" and tells when "Jane played the piano." Dependent clauses may also be adjective and noun.

The subject, predicate, indirect object, and direct object pattern of sentence may also be extended through the use of modifiers. To extend any sentence pattern, one may use adjectives and adverbs,as well as appositives, and dependent clauses. Modifiers add information about subjects, predicates, and direct/indirect objectives. Students with teacher guidance may have exciting, motivating class sessions in classifying sentence patterns as well as in extending sentences. One of the most exhilarating observational visits made by the author as supervisor of student teachers in the public schools was to observe a sixth grade class using and experimenting with different words, phrases, and clauses to expand sentences being discussed by the class as a whole, followed by small group discussion, and individual work. Students used what had been learned when writing different forms of poetry, rhymed and unrhymed. The class as a whole, small groups, and individual endeavors were in evidence to meet learning style needs of students (See Searson and Dunn, 2001).

Types of Sentences

Learning sentence patterns and ways of extending sentences helps students to become better readers and writers when understanding the structure of the English language. Understanding and using different sentence patterns and

expanding each sentence pattern, as needed, helps learners to understand the English language in a functional way. Attaching meaning to four basic types of sentences assists students to further understand how the English language operates.

1. declarative sentences make a statement of fact or opinion as in the following:

a) Nita rode a bicycle.
b) She appears to enjoy reading.

Declarative sentences end with a period and the spoken voice drops in a lowered pitch at the end of the sentence.

2. interrogative sentences ask questions and have a question mark at the end of the sentence as in the following:

a) Is Albert coming to the picnic?
b) How old is he?

3. imperative sentences issue or give a command or request as in the following:

a) Open the window.
b) Please close the door.

4. Exclamatory sentences show strong feeling and end with an exclamation mark, as in the following:

a) Bob hit a home run!
b) Alice just now made a three pointer to win the basketball game! (See Ediger, 1999, 3-11).

Once students perceive the differences in the above named four sentence types, they may use these in functional writing as well as in oral communication. Each sentence may also be classified in terms of sentence patterns. Students may experiment in how to expand each sentence pattern. Learning the structure of the English language can be fun as well as being highly informative in improving reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. What has been learned may be revealed in numerous ways (See Gardner, 1993).

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